

## Diversity and human rights in the exercise of teaching: perceptions of the basic education teacher

### ARTICLE

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### Abstract

The research investigates the perceptions and practices of Basic Education teachers in relation to gender, sexuality and human rights issues. The general objective is to investigate how these teachers perceive, interpret and incorporate these themes in their pedagogical practices, aiming to contribute to the development of more inclusive and effective educational strategies. Focusing on a sample of four professors trained in Human Sciences, the study used a structured questionnaire to explore the approach to these themes in their disciplines. The results indicate that all participants recognize the importance of including such questions, even when not required by the syllabus. Half of the teachers believe that curriculum policies need significant adjustments to better integrate these themes. These results highlight the need for further discussions and actions to promote education that is more inclusive and sensitive to gender and sexuality diversities, reinforcing the importance of human rights in the educational context.

**Keywords:** Gender. Sexuality. Human rights. Inclusion.

### Diversidade e direitos humanos no exercício do magistério: percepções do professor da educação básica

### Resumo

A pesquisa investiga as percepções e práticas de professores da Educação Básica em relação a temas de gênero, sexualidade e direitos humanos. O objetivo geral é investigar como esses professores percebem, interpretam e incorporam esses temas em suas práticas pedagógicas, visando contribuir para o desenvolvimento de estratégias educacionais mais inclusivas e eficazes. Focando em uma amostra de quatro docentes formados em Ciências Humanas, o estudo utilizou um questionário estruturado para explorar a abordagem desses temas em suas disciplinas. Os resultados indicam que todos os participantes reconhecem a importância de incluir tais questões, mesmo quando não exigidas pela ementa. Metade dos professores acredita que as políticas curriculares necessitam de ajustes significativos para melhor integrar esses temas. Esses resultados destacam a necessidade de mais discussões e ações para promover uma educação mais inclusiva e sensível às diversidades de gênero e sexualidade, reforçando a importância dos direitos humanos no contexto educacional.

**Palavras-chave:** Gênero. Sexualidade. Direitos Humanos. Inclusão.

## 1 Introduction

2 Diversity and human rights have been central themes in the contemporary educational context, especially with regard to the role of teachers in basic education (Afonso; Rodrigues; Oliveira, 2018). This study aims to investigate the perceptions of elementary school teachers in relation to these crucial themes, exploring their experiences and reflections in teaching.

In the context of basic education, issues related to gender, sexuality and human rights have become increasingly relevant and necessary (Piovesan, 2005; Abreu; Hirata; Lombardi, 2016). The inclusion of these themes in the educational context not only reflects the diversity of contemporary society, but also challenges educators to promote inclusive and respectful school environments (Benevides, 2007).

This study aims to explore the perceptions and practices of primary school teachers in relation to these sensitive issues that are crucial to the development of a more plural and equal education. The study will focus on the perceptions of these teachers regarding the inclusion of gender, sexuality and human rights issues in their pedagogical practices. It will investigate how these educators interpret, approach and integrate the themes of gender, sexuality and human rights in the context of the subjects they teach, taking into account current curriculum policies and the challenges faced in everyday school life.

The problem highlighted is that the discussion of gender and diversity in schools often faces resistance and challenges, both in the context of educational policies and in classroom practice. This raises questions about how teachers perceive and respond to the demands for an education that promotes gender equality, respect for sexual diversity and the teaching of human rights in an educational context marked by diverse perspectives and sensitivities (Benevides, 2007). In view of this, the problem question posed for this study was: what are the perceptions and practices of

primary school teachers in relation to the inclusion of gender, sexuality and human rights issues in their subjects?

The general objective is to investigate how primary school teachers perceive, interpret and incorporate themes of gender, sexuality and human rights into their teaching practices, with a view to contributing to the development of more inclusive and effective educational strategies. The specific objectives are: to assess teachers' familiarity with the themes of gender, sexuality and human rights in their subjects; and to investigate teachers' perceptions of the adequacy of Brazilian basic education curriculum policies to discuss these sensitive themes.

This study is relevant to understanding how education can better respond to demands for inclusion, respect for diversity and the promotion of human rights in schools. By exploring teachers' perceptions, it is hoped to identify challenges and opportunities for strengthening educational practices that prepare students to live in a plural and democratic society.

## 2 Diversity and Human Rights in Initial Teacher Training

Initial teacher training is a crucial stage in which not only technical skills are developed, but also values and principles that will shape their teaching practice throughout their career (Afonso; Rodrigues; Oliveira, 2018). In this context, the integration of themes such as diversity and human rights emerges as an essential pillar for the development of a truly inclusive and socially responsible education (Piovesan, 2005; Benevides, 2007).

Firstly, it is essential to understand the breadth and importance of diversity in the educational context. Diversity goes beyond the visible differences of race, gender, sexual orientation and physical disability, and also encompasses cultural, religious, linguistic and socioeconomic aspects (Batista; Muniz; Lucena, 2015). The presence and appreciation of this diversity in schools not only enriches the educational

environment, but also prepares students to understand and respect the plurality of perspectives in society (Batista; Muniz; Lucena, 2015; Bruschini, 2007).

However, with regard to gender and sexuality, it is necessary to recognize the historical and contemporary struggles that involve education on these issues, especially in times of persecution and misinformation around the so-called “gender ideology”. Omissions or resistance to these discussions can result in educational environments that perpetuate inequalities and prejudices, rather than promoting equity and respect (Macedo, 2017).

Initial teacher training must therefore offer theoretical and practical tools so that future educators can recognize, welcome and integrate diversity into their teaching practices. This involves not only understanding the different manifestations of diversity, but also developing skills that promote an inclusive school environment where all students feel valued and respected (Benevides, 2007).

In addition to diversity, the inclusion of human rights in teacher training is essential for building a fairer and more equal society (Candau, 2013). Human rights are rights related to the intrinsic dignity of each individual, and basic rights such as the right to education, freedom of expression, gender equality, among others (Benevides, 2007). Incorporating these principles into teachers' initial training not only strengthens their ethical awareness, but also enables them to promote pedagogical practices that encourage respect for the fundamental rights of all students (Candau, 2007).

However, the effective implementation of training that values diversity and human rights faces significant challenges (Candau, 2007). There is often political, cultural and even institutional resistance that hinders the inclusion of these themes in academic curricula. Overcoming such obstacles requires not only individual actions by teachers, but also clear educational policies committed to promoting equality and social justice (Macedo, 2017).

Faced with these challenges, it is imperative that teacher training institutions develop programs that integrate diversity and human rights across the board in all subjects and curricular activities. This can be achieved by reviewing curricula,

continuously training teachers and creating spaces for reflection and debate on these issues in the academic environment (Pereira, 2017).

It should therefore be noted that initial teacher training should not only prepare them to teach specific content, but also to be an agent of social transformation, promoting an inclusive education committed to the universal values of human rights (Benevides, 2007).

### 3 Aspects of the curriculum in basic education

The curriculum in basic education plays a central role in structuring the educational process, being responsible for defining not only the content to be taught, but also the objectives, teaching methods and assessment that guide pedagogical practice in schools (Paraíso, 2016). In this context, it is essential to analyze the various aspects that make up the curriculum, its foundations, challenges and prospects for quality education.

Based on a series of principles, the curriculum in basic education aims to guarantee a comprehensive and equitable education for all students. Among these fundamentals is the integration of knowledge, seeking to promote a holistic education that develops academic competencies and socio-emotional skills (Paraíso, 2010; 2016). In addition, it must be flexible and adaptable, capable of meeting students' individual needs and the demands of contemporary society, incorporating new technologies and teaching methodologies (Rondini; Teixeira Filho; Toledo, 2024).

Promoting inclusion and diversity is another essential pillar of the curriculum, which must guarantee respect for and appreciation of cultural, ethnic and gender diversity (Scalon; Oliveira, 2012; Schütz; Fuchs, 2017; Schiefer, 2004; Schilling; Angelucci, 2016; Scott, 1990) and socioeconomic diversity present in classrooms (Scott, 1990). This not only enriches the educational environment, but also prepares students to live in a plural and democratic society. Curricular content must be

contextualized to the students' reality, being relevant to their lives and preparing them to face present and future challenges in a critical and reflective way (Junqueira, 2009).

In order to face current and future challenges, it is essential to consider some promising perspectives for curriculum development in Basic Education.

Firstly, promoting an interdisciplinary approach can be crucial. Integrating different disciplines stimulates creativity, critical thinking and students' ability to solve complex problems in an integrated and holistic way (Pereira, 2017).

Educational technology also represents a significant perspective. Using technologies strategically can enrich the curriculum, offering new ways of learning and interacting that are better suited to the constantly evolving digital world (Junqueira, 2009). In addition, strengthening inclusive and equitable education policies and practices is fundamental. This involves ensuring that all students, regardless of their individual differences, have access to quality education that respects and values the diversity present in classrooms (Oliveira; Gava; Unbehau, 2019; Rondini; Teixeira Filho; Toledo, 2024).

Community participation is also essential (Schütz; Fuchs, 2017). Actively involving parents, students and the school community in defining and implementing the curriculum not only promotes a more democratic and participatory education, but also strengthens the bond between school and community, creating a more collaborative and engaged educational environment (Rios, 2006; Junqueira, 2007).

It is therefore considered that the curriculum in Basic Education is a powerful tool for promoting quality, equitable and inclusive education (Louro, 2009; Zluhan; Raitz, 2014). By recognizing its foundations, facing its challenges and exploring its future prospects, we can build schools that are more effective in preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century (Xavier Filha, 2020; Cordeiro; Friede; Miranda, 2023).

## 4 Methodology

To investigate the perceptions of elementary school teachers at a municipal elementary school located in São Paulo/SP - here named “focus school” for ethical reasons - about diversity and human rights in the exercise of teaching, a form containing closed questions was used, characterizing the research as a survey.

This instrument was sent by email (to avoid physical contact with the research participants) to 10 randomly selected teachers, and was available for response from March 1st to April 31st, 2024. The form included questions that explored topics such as the approach to gender, sexuality and human rights issues in the subjects taught, the perception of curricular policies related to these topics and personal experiences of dealing with situations of trans/homophobic violence in the school environment.

The data collected was analyzed using content analysis techniques. This approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the participants' responses, identifying patterns, categories and emerging themes related to teachers' perceptions and experiences.

All participants were informed of the research objectives and voluntarily consented to take part. All the information collected was treated with confidentiality and anonymity, guaranteeing respect for the ethical principles of research.

It is important to recognize that, due to the small sample size, the results of this study may not be generalizable to all primary school teachers. In addition, the self-reported nature of the responses may imply perception bias.

It is hoped that the results of this study will provide significant contributions to the development of educational strategies and policies that promote a more inclusive and sensitive approach to diversity and human rights issues in the school context.

## 5 Data Analysis and Discussion

The results of the survey show that four teachers took part, all of whom had a degree in the Human Sciences (100%) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Training area**



Source: research data

With regard to the presence of themes related to gender, sexuality and human rights in the subjects in which the teachers work, 25% indicated that there is a lot of approach, 50% mentioned that there is some approach, and 25% said that there is no focus on these themes at all.

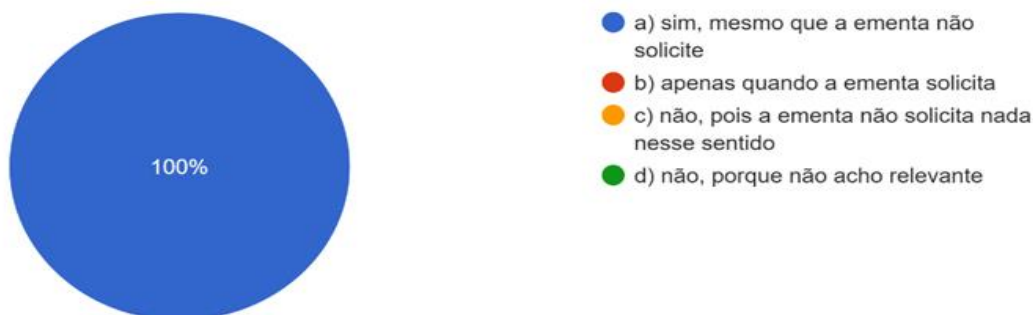
These findings seem to be consistent with previous studies that highlight challenges in effectively incorporating these themes into the school curriculum. Afonso, Rodrigues and Oliveira (2018), for example, discuss how sexual diversity is addressed in a limited and often marginalized way in formal education, reflecting the urgent need for more inclusive curricular policies. In addition, Piovesan (2005) argues that human rights education should be a priority in schools, reinforcing the importance of promoting a culture of respect and equality from an early age.

The data collected suggests that there is a growing awareness among teachers of the importance of these issues, but also highlights significant gaps in practical implementation. To make progress in this field, it is essential not only to revise curriculum policies, but also to provide adequate support to educators to facilitate sensitive and inclusive discussions in the classroom (Abreu; Hirata; Lombardi, 2016).

As for working directly with gender and diversity issues in class, all the teachers taking part in the survey (100%) said that they address these issues, even if the syllabus does not explicitly request it (Figure 2).



**Figure 2 - Working directly with gender and diversity issues in class**

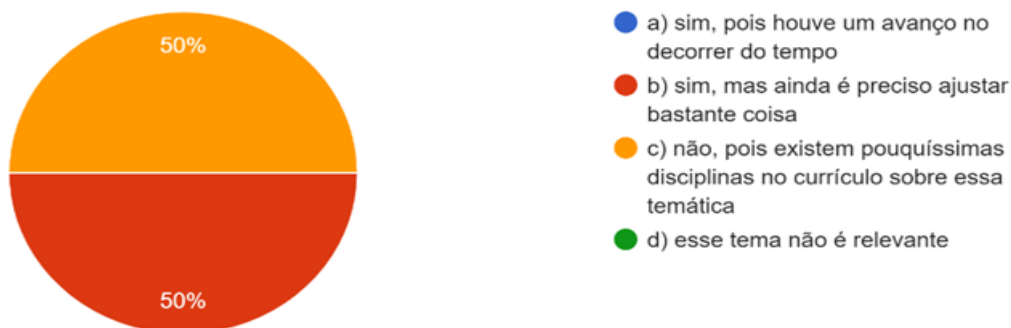


Source: research data

Figure 2 reveals a significant commitment on the part of teachers to working with gender and diversity issues in the classroom. According to Bruschini (2007), education should reflect the gender diversity present in society, promoting an inclusive approach that respects all identities. Louro (2009), in turn, highlights the need to combat heteronormativity in schools, ensuring a safe and welcoming environment for all students.

With regard to curriculum policies for basic education in Brazil, half of the respondents (50%) believe that progress has been made, but there is still a lot to adjust, while the other 50% consider that there are very few subjects on this topic in the curriculum (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Perception of curricular policies in Brazilian basic education**

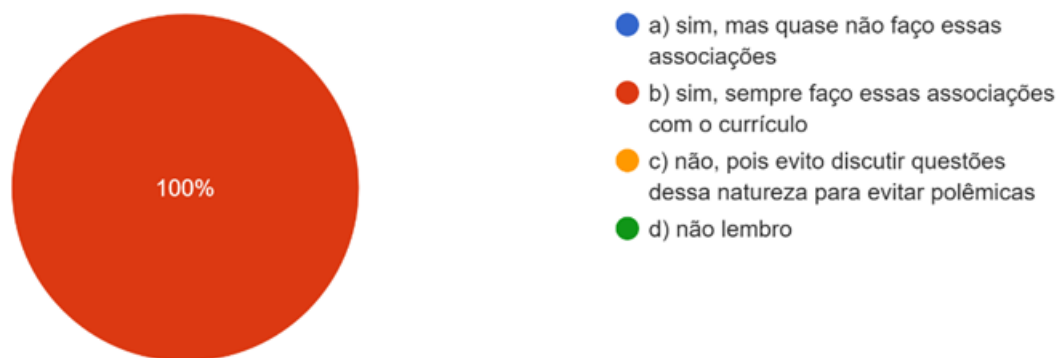


Source: research data

The results obtained seem to reflect the intersectionality between gender and education, as discussed by Abreu, Hirata and Lombardi (2016). They highlight the importance of curricular policies that not only recognize but also celebrate gender diversity in Brazilian basic education. This approach is crucial to promoting a more inclusive and respectful educational environment, in line with the human rights principles advocated by Benevides (2007) and Candau (2007). In view of this, it is possible to state that the data presented corroborates the theoretical analyses of the authors consulted, emphasizing both the advances and the persistent challenges in implementing inclusive and gender-sensitive educational policies in the Brazilian context.

Finally, in relation to the teachers' personal experience, 100% of the respondents said they had already witnessed situations of trans/homophobic violence associated with the subjects they teach, with half (50%) always making these associations with the curriculum, while the other 50% said that this happens, but less frequently (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Teachers' personal experience of trans/homophobic violence associated with the subjects they teach**



Source: research data

The results of the survey reveal a worrying picture regarding teachers' experience of trans/homophobic violence related to the subjects they teach, as illustrated in Figure 4. All the participants reported having witnessed such incidents,

with half of them frequently associating these occurrences with the curriculum, while the other half mentioned that these associations occur less frequently.

When discussing these results in the light of the authors consulted, it is possible to see that the problem of heteronormativity and homophobia in schools, addressed by Louro (2009), highlights how these dominant norms perpetuate discrimination and violence against LGBT+ students. Batista, Muniz and Lucena's (2015) discussion of public policies on human rights highlights the importance of educational measures to combat these forms of discrimination, promoting an inclusive and respectful school culture.

Paraíso (2016), in exploring curriculum dynamics, emphasizes how the curriculum can reproduce or challenge gender norms, directly influencing interactions and perceptions within the school. The results of the research reinforce the urgent need for more inclusive and diversity-sensitive curricula, capable of creating a safe and welcoming educational environment for all students.

Overall, the results of the survey provide a detailed insight into the perceptions and practices of primary school teachers in relation to the inclusion of gender, sexuality and human rights issues in their subjects. All four respondents have a background in the Humanities, indicating an academic profile that would theoretically favor sensitivity to more inclusive and critical approaches (Figure 1).

In relation to the presence of these themes in the subjects they teach, the data reveals a varied distribution: 25% of the teachers indicated that there is a lot of approach, 50% mentioned that there are some approaches, and 25% stated that there is no specific focus on these themes (Figure 2). These results corroborate previous studies that highlight the inconsistency in incorporating themes of sexual and gender diversity into the school curriculum (Afonso; Rodrigues; Oliveira, 2018).

The literature consulted points out that, despite recognizing the importance of inclusive and respectful education, Brazilian curricular policies often fail to offer clear and mandatory guidelines for the inclusion of these topics (Piovesan, 2005; Batista; Muniz; Lucena, 2015). The lack of an explicit approach may reflect both conservative

resistance and the need for adequate training for teachers to deal with these issues in a sensitive and informed manner (Cordeiro; Friede; Miranda, 2023).

With regard to working directly with gender and diversity issues in class, all the teachers (100%) stated that they address these issues, even if they are not explicitly demanded by the curriculum. This finding is encouraging, as it indicates a personal commitment on the part of the teachers to promote discussions that are relevant to students' civic and ethical education.

However, when asked about the adequacy of Brazilian basic education curriculum policies to discuss these sensitive issues, there was a division of opinions: half of the respondents (50%) consider that the policies are adequate, but still require adjustments, while the other half (50%) believe that there is very little approach to these issues in the curriculum (Figure 3). This perception highlights the urgent need to review and update educational policies, ensuring that all schools are equipped to promote a safe and inclusive educational environment for all students (Junqueira, 2007; Louro, 2009).

A particularly worrying aspect is the teachers' personal experience of situations of trans/homophobic violence associated with the subjects they teach. All the respondents (100%) said they had witnessed such incidents, with half of them indicating that this happens frequently (Figure 4). These data reflect the persistence of discriminatory practices in the school environment, despite individual teachers' efforts to promote a more inclusive environment (Rondini; Teixeira Filho; Toledo, 2024).

When discussing these results in the light of the literature consulted, it is clear that human rights education and the promotion of gender diversity remain significant challenges for the Brazilian education system (Paraíso, 2016; Pereira, 2017). The effective implementation of inclusive curriculum policies requires not only structural changes, but also continuous investment in teacher training and institutional support (Oliveira; Gava; Unbehau, 2019).

Therefore, the data collected in this research not only confirms the relevance of these themes in educational practice, but also highlights the urgent need for policies

and practices that promote a truly inclusive and respectful education for all Brazilian students.

## 5 Conclusions

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The results of this study highlight the complexity and relevance of primary school teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of gender, sexuality and human rights issues in their teaching practices. Initially, we observed that the majority of teachers recognize the importance of these issues, as evidenced by their significant commitment to working directly with diversity issues in the classroom. This finding reflects a positive advance in awareness of the need for an inclusive education that respects sexual and gender diversity.

However, the data also reveals significant challenges in the practical implementation of these initiatives. The limited presence of these themes in school curricula, as perceived by half of the respondents, suggests that there is an urgent need to review and strengthen Brazilian curricular policies in order to better integrate these contents in a more comprehensive and systematic way.

Teachers' personal experience of situations of trans/homophobic violence associated with the subjects they teach is alarming, highlighting the persistence of challenges in the school environment in relation to safety and respect for diversity. These situations require a more robust response, both in terms of educational policies and continuing teacher training, in order to deal effectively with such issues.

In addition, the theoretical analysis and empirical data converge on the need for more inclusive curricular policies that are sensitive to gender and diversity issues, in line with human rights principles. Human rights education cannot just be an ideal, but a concrete practice that permeates all disciplines and pedagogical practices, preparing students not only for academic knowledge, but also for life in a plural and democratic society.

It is therefore essential that educational institutions and policymakers recognize these challenges and work together with teachers to develop effective strategies that promote a truly inclusive education committed to human rights. Only in this way can we move forward in building schools where all students feel valued, respected and protected, regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation or any other characteristic that makes them unique.

This research makes a significant contribution to the educational field by highlighting not only teachers' perceptions, but also the gaps and opportunities for improving educational practices in Brazil. It is hoped that the results will inspire new studies and initiatives that promote education that is fairer, more inclusive and in line with the universal values of respect and dignity for all.

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